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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: priority themes: social services for all**

## Elements for the agreed conclusions of the Commission

**Submitted by the Vice-Chairperson of the Commission, Faith Innerarity (Jamaica)**

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# I. Introduction

1. Social services have positive externalities and synergies that enhance social and economic development. Investment in social services will contribute to social progress and cohesion, economic productivity, productive employment, civil participation and societal peace. It is of fundamental importance that national Governments provide social services, even and especially in times of economic recession. Furthermore, it is essential that the economic and fiscal policies pursued by Governments support and encourage the social goals that they advocate.

2. The primary responsibility for social services rests with national Governments. In many countries, the provision of social services also relies upon active citizens, non-governmental organizations and voluntary groups, as well as trade unions and private businesses, but Governments — through international, national, regional and local policies — have the main responsibility for creating an enabling environment to promote the establishment and maintenance of social services and to ensure equity in access to social services.

3. The Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development enumerates many different forms of social services, which may be grouped under three broad headings:

(a) Services to meet the essential needs of the entire population;

(b) Services which respond to needs that exist at different stages in an individual's lifespan;

(c) Services tailored to the requirements of population groups with specific needs.

# II. General principles and goals

4. Ensuring that high-quality, basic social services are available to all must be a high priority for all Governments, requiring them to make those goals central political commitments, mobilizing the necessary political will and recognizing the importance of the rights to inclusion, accountability and participation.

5. In all countries, to a greater or lesser extent, social services are not available to all people at all times. In many countries, a major obstacle to the provision of social services is lack of development. Also, Governments and other social service providers face a changing environment which poses further challenges and calls for new ideas. The planning and provision of services should take into account changing family circumstances, changing roles for and demands on women, shifts in population age structure, and mass migration and displacement of people.

6. A major objective of social services is to facilitate greater equity and equality of opportunities for every member of society. Social services are essential to enable people to satisfy their basic human needs and to live lives of dignity, safety and creativity while participating fully in society. Services should be based on concepts of full participation and non-discrimination. Access to all social services should be ensured for those who are living in poverty, are disadvantaged or have special needs, in particular persons with disabilities and older persons. Services should be adapted to ensure they remain appropriate to the needs of those groups.

7. Services should be designed which both recognize and serve the specific needs of girls and women. Public agencies and non-governmental organizations should involve women at all stages of decision-making in the planning, management and delivery of social services. In developing countries especially, women often bear the brunt of responsibilities resulting from a general lack of social service provision. Policies should recognize their contributions and provide them support in those roles.

8. Policy concepts devised to enhance the creation and maintenance of services must take into account the differences in the social and economic development of individual United Nations Member States. Variations in the range and coverage of services among and within countries may reflect both different stages of development and different cultural situations. There are also important local, regional and national differences affecting the needs of different population groups, including the socially excluded and those living in poverty, and such differences should be reflected in policies and programmes.

# III. Social services to promote social development

9. Those who provide or finance social services should scrutinize how, where, when and in what manner services are delivered. Policies should aim to ensure the integration of social services into a system which combines a wide range of different services that are coordinated with each other and thus provide complementary help and support. When approaches and practices have outlived their original

rationale or when needs have changed, innovation is called for, so that:

(a) The hours when services are available should correspond to user convenience. Timetables might be adjusted to make service provision more responsive to people's needs;

(b) Several services could be grouped around a basic service to respond to several needs at the same time;

(c) Services could be provided at non-traditional sites where people naturally congregate.

10. Older persons should be guaranteed full participation and non-discrimination in access to services which seek to ensure that they continue to have active lives and participate in society. Access to social services, adapted to the special needs of every person, ensures that older persons are able to grow old securely and with their dignity and independence preserved.

11. Persons with disabilities — and where appropriate their families and advocates — should have access to information regarding rights and available services, at all stages and in forms or formats which are accessible to them. Systems for social provision must not exclude or discriminate against people with disabilities, and should sustain an optimum level of independence and functioning. Where financially feasible, respite care and attendant services should be made available for families which include a person with disability.

12. Social services can play a vital role in national policies to prevent people from being forced to leave their home country for economic, social or environmental reasons; or to promote and facilitate the return of migrants. Receiving countries should guarantee equal access to social services for migrants who have been granted the right to reside permanently. They should also ensure that services take into account any special needs of those migrants and their families. Countries should offer special counselling services for those migrants and their families, in close cooperation with non-governmental welfare associations.

## IV. Partnership

13. Governments have primary responsibility for ensuring that basic services are available to all. It is the responsibility of the State to guarantee social rights, and the public sector plays a key role in securing universal access by all people to social services. This does not imply that Governments are solely responsible for all service delivery, or that decisions about how services are delivered should be made by Governments alone. Civil society must play a major supportive role in planning, organizing and providing social services. Public authorities should cooperate with others in order to offer adequate coverage and a wide range of services to users. Decisions about services are properly made with the full involvement of all those who have a stake in them, with particular emphasis on users and local communities. The involvement of volunteers is particularly valuable.

14. There are many forms of partnership between the State and civil society. Depending on the circumstances, different options can be considered for how this partnership might take effect. In some instances, Governments may wish to be the main service providers and organize delivery directly with assistance from partners; in other cases, the role of Government might be to guarantee national minimum standards and enable other actors to take a more direct role in provision and delivery. Such other actors might include quasi-governmental agencies, cooperatives, civic groups, community and other non-governmental organizations, including religious communities, and the for-profit private sector. Partners should also always include the users or beneficiaries of the services to be delivered.

15. Partnership should be based on shared goals; a sense of equity among the partners; mutual acceptance of different views; joint decision-making, as appropriate; and joint commitment to the process. Partnership can be strengthened through institutionalized formal councils at the national and local levels which permit all interested groups to be represented. Such mechanisms can also reduce waste and the misuse of resources, and can promote monitoring and the provision of feedback concerning service delivery.

16. Partnership requires that all actors involved be held accountable both to one another and to the users of the services. It is important to establish standards for measuring service delivery, based on a common understanding of needs and desirable outcomes. Services should be evaluated on a continuing basis, and feedback should be provided and assessed. Special attention should be given to improving the quality of management of social services and the training of staff. It is advisable for non-governmental organizations to monitor their activities through appropriate mutually agreed mechanisms.

17. Particularly in many developing countries, people still lack access to the most basic services. Communities need to be able to participate in defining needs and planning new services, which can be achieved in part through the use of participatory poverty assessments.

## V. Information

18. Access to information is an essential attribute of a democratic society and the basis for effective participation in decision-making, including decisions regarding the provision and financing of social services. Priority should be given to improving access to information for all people. Access to information should be seen as a social right. Information management is essential for planning and delivering appropriate, efficient and effective services. The design of services should automatically include provision for information-gathering, monitoring and evaluation. Information about available social services should be easy to find and easy to understand.

19. The possibilities created by technological advances for making information more widely available, particularly to the under-served and disadvantaged, should be fully explored and exploited. Partnership between government, civil society and the media, both public and private, should be encouraged. In particular:

(a) Public agencies should devote more resources to spreading the use of information technology;

(b) Efforts should be made to facilitate access to information technology for those who are home-bound, persons with disabilities, people in rural areas and groups with special needs who might otherwise be in danger of becoming marginalized.

## VI. Resources and their effective use

20. It is important to synchronize economic and social policy so that social service provision furthers both social and economic objectives. All members of society benefit from an educated, healthy, informed, secure, responsible and tolerant citizenry. Spending for services thus benefits not only the users of services but the community at large, which is the principal justification for allocating appropriate resources from public revenue to provide social services. Public funding of basic social services is also essential to ensure equitable access. National general revenues should continue to be the principal source of public funds to finance social services, for reasons of equity, efficiency and reliability.

21. Public authorities normally face budgetary constraints, and possibilities for coping with those difficulties vary among countries. It remains necessary to ensure adequate sources of revenue. National Governments should explore new approaches, including restructuring national budgets, to acquire adequate financial resources for creating and securing social services that meet the basic human needs of all people. For example, during the last decade many countries have reduced the proportion of gross domestic product allocated to military expenditure. Reorientations of outlays allow allocation of increased financial resources to social services.

22. To expand revenues, various options are available: improving tax administration to reduce tax evasion and avoidance; broadening the tax base by, *inter alia*, increasing the share of direct taxes in the overall revenue mix; and reducing tax exemptions and rebates. The pool of resources could be further enlarged through the imposition of user fees and co-payments for certain services; obligatory contributions, such as payroll and social security taxes; insurance schemes; or various forms of public borrowing for investment, as appropriate.

23. The efficiency of current expenditure within the public sector could be improved by focusing on outcomes rather than inputs.

24. Resources also encompass the resources of the private sector and the not-for-profit and voluntary sectors. They comprise not only financial resources but also resources in kind: the time and effort that people devote to meeting their needs, and the skills, knowledge and capacities of people, including family networks and community-based organizations. Policies should be developed that allow all those resources, actual and latent, to be mobilized and deployed effectively.

## VII. International dimensions

25. The external environment, through its impact on national economies, affects the capacity of countries to provide and expand quality social services, particularly through the constraints that an unfavourable external economic climate imposes on national budgets and the resources of other social actors. For developing countries in particular, progress in regard to the external debt, improvements in the terms of trade, more favourable trading regimes and more socially sensitive approaches to structural adjustment would create additional opportunities and would generate more of the resources required to expand and upgrade services, both public and private. International cooperation should also assist developing countries in ensuring the provision of basic social services during periods of economic and budgetary difficulty. Stabilization and structural adjustment packages must pay attention to social

needs and contribute to the provision of safety nets for the most vulnerable.

26. Recent efforts to reform structural adjustment programmes are welcomed, and the recognition that essential services need to be provided when retrenchment becomes inevitable should be more fully translated into action and implemented.

27. Globalization has meant that capital is increasingly mobile and industries are increasingly able to relocate easily. There is a danger of downward harmonization of social services and social protection as countries try to minimize the imposition of taxes on capital and industries that might otherwise relocate. More international attention and enhanced international discussion and cooperation is required to safeguard the revenue base of countries and their capacity to finance social services. Arrangements are required to strengthen international cooperation with regard to taxation so as to minimize tax evasion and avoidance and limit tax competition.

28. Current trends in levels of official development assistance (ODA) remain a cause for concern. Those trends need to be reversed, and countries are urged to renew efforts to reach the 0.7 per cent target for ODA, as well as to consider initiatives to channel additional resources into basic social services. Combining national resources with external assistance for that purpose — such as the 20/20 initiative — would be particularly valuable.

29. A growing number of issues are acquiring an international dimension, and international or at least regional coordination in the planning of services needs correspondingly greater attention. A study of how economic and social policies interact and sometimes diverge could be a valuable contribution to preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of the outcome of the Summit.

30. The United Nations, the agencies of the United Nations system and other multilateral institutions play an important role in promoting high quality social services, and should be appropriately supported in their efforts. The expansion of the financing of social investments by multinational financial institutions, international and regional, is a positive development which deserves appropriate support, in particular to maintain the capacities of such institutions to lend at concessionary rates.

31. The Summit set such time-bound targets as achieving universal primary education by the year 2015 and specified improvements in infant, child and maternal mortality and life expectancy. The achievement of those commitments will require substantial improvement in access to and delivery, quality and financing of social services. The Commission recommends that the General Assembly reinforce those commitments at the special session by considering the national strategies and supportive international policies necessary for their achievement.